

SOME MORAL ASPECTS OF EUGENICS

By THE REV. W. R. INGE, D.D.

(Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge)

SINCE the object of all social morality is the good of the human race, and since eugenics also has no other end in view except the improvement of the human race, it is plain that social morality and eugenics are indissolubly connected. The moralist and the biologist may have a somewhat different standard of values, but they want the same thing—to make men better. They further agree in one very important principle, which distinguishes them from the advocates of some other causes and movements. The moralist and the biologist both maintain that the test of the well-being of a country is not the amount of its exports and imports, nor the diffusion of its wealth, nor its military and naval strength, nor its educational efficiency, nor its political freedom, but the kind of men and women that it turns out. Progress, for the moralist and for the biologist alike, means improvement in the people themselves, and not in their conditions. Both agree with Herbert Spencer that you cannot get golden conduct out of leaden instincts. In more homely language you cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. No political machinery can prevent an aggregate of degenerate citizens from being a degenerate nation.

“For forms of government let fools contest !
Whate'er is best administered is best.”

And the administration of laws and customs depends on character in the widest sense.

I shall assume, as a proposition not likely to be contradicted, that the common aim of sociology and of eugenics is that between the present time and the end of the period when the earth will remain habitable, there shall be the largest possible

number of men and women who to the largest possible extent realise the ideal of what a human being ought to be. We have no right to sacrifice the present for the future, nor the future for the present. The welfare of a man who will be born ten thousand years hence counts for neither more nor less than that of any one of our own contemporaries. The whole future of humanity, immediate and distant, is our province.

So far, social morality and eugenics seem to be perfectly harmonious in their aims. The opportunity for discussion, and probably disagreement, first appears when we ask what types of humanity we wish to encourage, and what means we wish to employ to produce them.

The first question to be considered is the relative value to be attached to physical, moral, and intellectual qualities. To take a concrete instance. A married pair, whose family history and beautiful characters give promise of uncommon moral excellence in their children, have a rickety or a deaf and dumb child, and the doctor advises them that if they have other children they are not unlikely to be similarly afflicted. Are we to say that it is their duty to have no more children? Or again. Some of the members of a neurotic family display brilliant, if erratic, intellectual powers, perhaps amounting even to genius, combined with great moral callousness. Is it eugenically worth while to speculate on the chance of a possible Shakespeare or Napoleon in the next generation?

Here the strict moralist and the biologist may possibly part company. The moralist will say with Matthew Arnold that conduct is three-fourths, or the whole, of life, and that no physical or intellectual qualities are commensurable with morality. It by no means follows that the *religious* man will agree with him. In the higher religions there is an intellectual and an æsthetic element, neither of which will consent to be a mere means to morality. In fact, I think I could show, if it would not take me too far from my subject, that pure moralism is from the religious standpoint self-contradictory and untenable. Obedience to the "categorical imperative," without reference to ulterior aims or consequences, is not a possible principle for the conduct of human life. Perhaps most of us here to-day would agree that

physical, intellectual, and moral excellence have each an independent and positive value; but that these values are not equal, intellectual excellence having a higher worth than physical, and moral than intellectual. We should probably acquiesce in the continuance of the exceptionally virtuous but physically unsound family, if we were convinced that the desirable moral qualities were as likely to be inherited as the undesirable physical conditions. As for the erratic genius, perhaps we could afford to go in for a speculative investment. One Shakespeare would outweigh several rascals. But I doubt if this speculation would be a good one. The genius generally appears *before* nervous degeneracy is strongly marked in a family, and, in spite of Lombroso, a good stock seems more likely to produce a great man than a bad stock.

We can only defer to the moralist so far as to place virtue above brains and brawn; we cannot allow him to have everything his own way. We certainly do not want a society so plethoric in altruistic virtue, and so lean in other goods, that every citizen wishes for nothing better than to be a sick-nurse to somebody else.

If I were speaking of the eugenic ideal, I should have to raise a question which perhaps some day, in the far future, may be of great practical importance, *viz.* : Would the state, in which eugenic principles were triumphant, desire to turn out all its citizens on the same model, according to the best attainable type? Would the citizens of this ideal state all have the physique of Greek gods and goddesses, with well-developed brain capacity and high moral principles, or would they be differentiated according to the functions which they are to perform? Would the state have a breed of human mastiffs for its policemen, of human greyhounds for its postmen, and so on? This question, though it is hardly one of pressing urgency, may suggest that the problem of eugenics is not a simple one. Biology and sociology will have to come to terms with each other. If the stock is to be improved by rational choice, we must know what kind of excellence or efficiency we want to have, and we must weigh the claims of the "social organism" against those of individuals.

Our present task, I take it, is not to agitate for legislation, but to educate public opinion by diffusing knowledge of facts already ascertained, and to educate ourselves by further study of the subject. At the last meeting which I attended Prof. Karl Pearson to some extent threw cold water upon the Society, though in the friendliest spirit. He thought we ought to wait half a century before beginning to move. Well ; with all respect to his great authority, I venture to think that it is not too soon to try to convince the public of certain broad principles, and that a few definite rules might be based upon them without rashness. If I am wrong, there are specialists here present who can set me right.

One general principle which I believe to be incontestable is, that if natural selection is inhibited, if nature is not allowed to take her own way of eliminating her failures, rational selection must take its place. Otherwise nothing can prevent the race from reverting to an inferior type. Humanitarian legislation, or practice, requires to be supplemented, and its inevitable evil effects counteracted, by eugenic practice, and ultimately by eugenic legislation. The need is more urgent when, as in our own country, the constitution of society favours the multiplication of the unfit and the elimination of the higher types. Among the successful classes, prudential limitation of the family, by late marriages or by other means, is the rule. The birth-rate has declined 25 per cent. since 1876, and since there has been but little change in the lowest strata, the fall in the upper class is probably nearly 40 per cent. This rule is observed most strictly by the wealthy, who wish to give all their children the advantages which the possession of independent means confers ; but its operation is perceptible in every class of society except the lowest—the rank and file of manual labourers. In this lowest class, a large family, so far from being an imprudence, is a good investment. The working man counts upon making perhaps half his income out of the earnings of his boys and girls living at home. In some districts the working classes are so much afraid of sterile marriages, on purely economic grounds, that in a sadly large number of cases they will not marry until they know that the marriage will be fruitful. Now it would be a great mistake

to suppose that all this class belong to poor stocks whose increase is undesirable ; but, on the whole, it cannot be doubted that they are inferior to the upper class, and if so, the distribution of the birth-rate in this country is highly anti-eugenic.

I will risk your disapprobation by adding that, in the absence of emigration on a large scale, the birth-rate in England, where the births still outnumber the deaths by five to three, is much too high. I know that this is not an opinion which is often heard. Some socialists, indeed, teach that the country might support an almost unlimited population, because each new citizen makes work for his neighbour. It reminds one of the schoolboy's answer: "The inhabitants of the Hebrides subsist mainly by taking in each other's washing." I am not concerned now with economic fallacies. But from the eugenic point of view a dense population is almost incompatible with perfect health and development. There must be pure air and elbow-room for all.

I cannot say that I am hopeful about the near future. I am afraid that the urban proletariat may cripple our civilisation, as it destroyed that of ancient Rome. These degenerates, who have no qualities that confer a survival value, will probably live as long as they can by "robbing hen-roosts," as Mr. Lloyd George truthfully describes modern taxation, and will then disappear. Meanwhile, we must do what we can, which is not very much. After all, in history things never work out either so well or so badly as they ought to do on logical principles.

I think it follows from what I have just said that we ought to favour any legislation which would reduce the prudential stimulus to population among slum-dwellers, and perhaps some others. The highest birth-rates at present are in the East End of London, where the average physique is exceedingly poor, and in the mining districts of South Wales, Durham, and part of the Midlands.

In the remainder of my paper I will consider certain definite moral problems and duties, and will then conclude with a few words upon the relation of biological science to Christian ethics. My subject is morality, not religion, but since for the majority of people ethics has a religious sanction, or even a religious foundation, and since by far the most widely accepted system of

religious ethics is that of Christianity, I do not think that the introduction of this topic can be called irrelevant. On the contrary, it seems to me to be inevitable, if we wish to face the facts with which we have to deal.

But first let us consider, in their moral aspect, certain definite problems and duties.

At present no pressure whatever is put by public opinion on men and women whom Mr. Galton would place without hesitation in Class I., to marry and have children. If such a man lives and dies unmarried we do not think any the worse of him. It never occurs to us that, in spite of his valuable contributions to literature, science, or what not, he has perhaps neglected the chief duty which God and his country required of him. We do not think it wicked to encourage a beautiful and glorious specimen of womanhood to become a nun or sister of mercy, with vows of perpetual virginity. Here, surely, is a case in which the Eugenics Education Society ought to have something to say. A man or woman belonging to a good stock ought to be told by public opinion that it is a duty to society for him or her to marry and have children.

Secondly, the movement in favour of a simpler life among the rich ought to enlist the active sympathy of this society. Luxury is unnatural and unwholesome. It encourages in many cases an artificial sterility or limitation of the family, for purely selfish reasons, which must be strongly condemned on moral grounds. Some good authorities think that luxury also tends to natural sterility. If I am right in my gloomy prediction that a bad time is coming, we shall see, I am afraid, that a great many families who have hitherto lived in comfort will prefer to die out rather than condemn their children to poverty. In a severe and prolonged economic crisis the wealthy families tend to disappear, chiefly from pride. Now the well-to-do classes in this country are, on an average, among the finest specimens of humanity which have appeared since the ancient Greeks. It would be a dire calamity if they disappeared. I want to see, in these good stocks, a new conception of nobility, a new pride of race, based on real superiority, not on coats of arms or broad acres. Perhaps the "Bushido" of Japan is the nearest

approach to what I mean. My new nobility would make rules for themselves—rules for health, rules of intellectual culture, rules of honourable and heroic conduct. And since most of them will not have much money to spend, it is desirable that they shall have a somewhat austere standard of living. The factitious association of nobility with ancestral wealth must be quite severed. Even if my worst fears for the future are realised, such a body of men and women, leagued together in determination to lead the noblest life, and to have the noblest children, would survive any troublous times, and hand on whatever is most precious in our culture to the happier age which we hope will follow the chaos.

Thirdly, I want to ask—Are the experts in the society in a position to draw up an authoritative list of physical conditions which are quite certainly unfavourable to healthy parenthood? Here I make no assertions, being ignorant; I only ask a few questions. Ought we to advise our friends in no case to marry an epileptic, a melancholic, a deaf mute, the sister of a bleeder (*hæmophilia*)? To what extent are consumption and cancer signs of degeneracy in a family? Do our authorities still contradict each other about the marriage of first cousins, or have any certain conclusions been reached on this subject? If these questions can be answered, they at once create new moral obligations.

My next point, like many others in Eugenics, is a somewhat delicate one. It may be that medical men could tell us of certain steps which might be taken for the improvement of the public health, which are at present obstructed mainly by moralists. On this point I wish to speak very plainly, as a Christian minister. The Founder of the Christian religion laid down, clearly and unmistakably, the principle that God does not use the blind forces of nature to chastise vice or sin. His disciples thought that a man who was born blind must have been stricken for his own sins (by anticipation or in a previous existence) or for those of his parents. The Master said: "Neither did this man sin nor his parents." A building at Jerusalem collapsed and killed eighteen persons. A special judgment! cried the people. No, said the Master; the victims were no

greater sinners than their neighbours. It follows that even if the diseases which follow certain human frailties struck only the guilty, and struck most heavily the most guilty, we should not be justified, on moral grounds, in omitting any means known to science of curing and preventing them. But if there is any scourge which does not strike the guilty only, which ruins innocent lives by thousands, and which is responsible for an incalculable amount of degeneration in the town populations of all civilised countries, then I say to those who would gladly leave things as they are, in the supposed interests of Christian morality, that their views are as false to the recorded teachings of Christ as they are repugnant to the common dictates of humanity and the future welfare of mankind.

I have now suggested several practical ways in which this society may use its moral influence in the right direction. I have, I think, avoided platitudes. I have taken the bull by the horns; I have raised some highly controversial questions. It remains that I should say a few words about the relation of Eugenics to Christian ethics. Incidentally, my remarks may serve as an explanation to some of my fellow-Christians of my grounds for differing from them.

The aim of Christian ethics is, quite definitely, the production of "the perfect man." (The word translated perfect means full-grown, complete and entire. The perfect man is the man who has realised in himself the ideal of what a man should be.) That this is the goal of Christian ethics may be proved by the impressive command in the Sermon on the Mount, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect," and by several passages in St. Paul, such as: "Till ye all come, in the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"; or "I pray God that your spirit and soul and body may be preserved entire and without blame unto the coming of Christ."

Since the goal is purely personal (I do not mean non-social) and qualitative, it follows that the whole apparatus of life is very lightly valued, except in so far as it ministers to health, wisdom, or moral excellence. Death is viewed with absolute indifference, for all spiritual values are eternal and indestructible.

Since a man takes himself with him into the unseen, he takes with him all that matters.

Thus Christianity involves a drastic revaluation of all the good things of life. Nothing bewildered the Pagan officials so much as the indifference of the Christians to pain and death—not only their own sufferings, but those of their nearest and dearest. The philosophic emperor Marcus Aurelius could only suggest that the Christians chose to die, rather than obey the laws, out of pure “cussedness.” “These men have turned the world upside down,” their enemies complained.

The time soon came when the Christians were able to apply to others the same austere standards which they accepted for themselves. And they did apply them consistently and ruthlessly. If it is better for a Christian to be eaten by a lion than to deny Christ, it is better, they argued, for the undesirable citizen to be burnt than to pursue his mischievous career any longer. The maxim, “Do as you would be done by,” is not always the harmless, good-natured rule which we generally suppose it to be.

You will see what I am driving at. Christian ethics does not (as is often supposed) teach the duty of preserving and multiplying life at all hazards. Once convinced that so-and-so was an undesirable citizen, the Church, while it believed in itself and had the power, lost no time in hurrying him out of the world. No doubt they usually burnt the wrong people, which was very unfortunate; and you must not suppose that I want to see *autos da fê* even of our most degraded specimens; but my point is that there is nothing inconsistent with Christianity in imposing as well as enduring personal sacrifice where the highest welfare of the community is at stake.

The German philosopher Nietzsche comments severely on the modern sensitiveness to physical pain. He thinks it a sign of decadence. We may agree with him here, though we must never forget what a debt humanity owes to the wave of philanthropic sentiment which swept away the stupid and purposeless barbarities of the Middle Ages. But when he goes on to identify what he calls slave-morality, or maudlin sentimentalism, with Christianity, he is making a great, though not an unnatural mistake.

Genuine Christianity—the real thing—is a joyous but robust and austere idealism, an enthusiastic devotion to an ideal of personal perfection which is believed to be also the will of the immanent guiding principle of the universe. Its renunciations and its ambitions, its real tenderness and its apparent cruelty, yes, and the feebleness of its hold over an age like our own, which has mistaken comfort for civilisation and machinery for progress—are all easily explained if we once understand what the Christian ideal really is. I do not know how it came about that the disciples of Rousseau, with their half-hysterical humanitarianism based on a thoroughly hedonistic valuation of life, proclaim it as the essence of the Gospel. I should be sorry to think that Christianity itself is suffering from fatty degeneration of the heart. I prefer to think that these sentimental faddists, who are perhaps the worst enemies just now of real progress, derive their principles from a totally different source.

Of course Christian ethics involves a high estimate of human dignity. For example, it can make no terms with any scheme of scientific race-culture which would destroy the sanctity of marriage. But no such scheme has been thought of, at any rate by this Society. Nor have we the right to impose restrictions on human liberty, beyond what is clearly desirable in the interests of future generations. But any sacrifices which a good man would make for the good of his kind, we shall have a right, when the time comes, to exact from those who are not good. Here, at any rate, I agree with the socialists, though I might differ from them as to how the principle ought to be applied.

I wish, in conclusion, to anticipate an objection which may be brought from the Christian side, an objection which I believe to be superficial, though it sounds plausible. It may be said to me: You began by telling us that legislative machinery is no good; that if we want to improve the race we must work upon character; and then you end by advocating a mechanical and non-moral remedy—that of rational selection on eugenic principles. Catholic Christianity, I may be reminded, has its own remedy for sin and suffering—namely, religious discipline and benevolence. Is it your object to make these superfluous by eliminating, as far as possible, the sinner and the sufferer?

My answer is, first, that all morality aims at subverting the conditions of its own existence, and that if it does not it at once ceases to be moral. The Christian prays to be *delivered* from temptation and from evil, which are the conditions under which alone moral activity is possible, and his whole life is a struggle against obstacles, which at the same time he recognises to be integral parts of the constitution of the phenomenal world. If you once give your moral assent to other people's sins and sorrows, as affording a field for your altruistic activities, your moral sense must be in a sadly diseased condition.

Secondly, the Churches must recognise that increasing knowledge has revolutionised our methods of dealing with evil. Instinct and superstition have been useful to the race in many ways ; but in the higher stages of culture they must give way to a far finer instrument, namely, reason. It is not Christian, it is only barbarous and mediæval, to say that cure is right, and prevention wrong. Be patient, my scientific friends, with us clergy, for we are the natural custodians of various race-traditions which are by no means so absurd as they often appear in our homilies ; but be quite firm with us in insisting that our common enemy must be met with modern weapons, and not with the cross-bows and battle-axes for which most of us have such a sentimental affection.